

Species Profile: *Haplochromis* sp. "madonna"



Hailing from Lake Kyoga in Uganda is the beautiful *Haplochromis* sp. "madonna". Like cichlids from the *Neochromis* genus of Lake Victoria, *Haplochromis* sp. "madonna" sports a rounded snout. This feature is also found in the *Tropheus* genus of Lake Tanganyika. Like its cousins, *Haplochromis* sp. "madonna" is an epileptic algae grazer. Les Kaufman dubbed this new species "madonna" in the field based on coloration. Reminded of the blonde hair and black roots of the famous singer, Kaufman correlated this to the dorsal coloration of this cichlid. There are interspecific coloration variants within this species. Generally speaking, the body has a copper colored sheen. The bottom portion of the dorsal fin is black matching the coloration of the pectoral fins. One distinguishing characteristic of this species is bright blue lips in dominant males. This feature is quite striking. The anal fin is translucent with a red hue. Between two and four well defined yellow egg shaped occulli adorn the anal fin as well. The coloration of the caudal and dorsal fins range from copper toned to classic Victorian red. Vertical barring is often most present in males while females show faded vertical barring with a broken line running laterally across the body.

The colony I have is young but extremely prolific. In my group of eight, it would appear that three are males and five are females. The males are territorial defending their areas aggressively. Males spar with one another bluffing with a series of advancements and with draws, fins extended and beautifully colored. At 6cm, they are happily

housed in a 65 gallon tank. *Haplochromis* sp. "madonna" appreciate a little rockwork with open areas. Males stake out and claim an area around a rock formation. The displays between males take place at the edge of each individuals territory. Most time is spent patrolling this territory, displaying at boundaries with adjacent males and trying to lure females to spawn with a series of diagonal shimmies.

This species, like most cichlids from the Victorian basin, are undemanding and easy to maintain. Thus far they have proved to be prolific as well. First spawns with young females have reaped between ten and fifteen fry. I suspect this total to increase as they grow larger. The adults are fed a basic staple flake as their primary food with the occasional sprinkling of Cyclop-Eeze flake. They fry are reared on crushed flake and Cyclop-Eeze powder.

This rarely seen cichlid was one of the species in the Victorian Species Survival Program and was distributed by Old World Tropicals. Hopefully private breeders who maintain this fish can propagate and increase their numbers so that others in the hobby can enjoy *Haplochromis* sp. "madonna".

— by Greg Steeves



Photo By Greg Steeves